

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 00750 020328Z

ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6804

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJECT: INDUSTRIES MINISTER RESIGNS FROM GOVERNMENT

1. AS HAD BEEN RUMORED FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, T.B. SUBASINGHE, MINISTER OF INDUSTRIES AND SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS, RESIGNED MARCH 1 FROM THE CABINET, OUT OF WHAT HE REPORTEDLY SAID WAS "DISILLUSIONMENT WITH GOVERNMENT SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL POLICY" AS WELL AS POLITICAL DIFFERENCES. IN FACT SUBASINGHE ACTED OUT OF A COMBINATION OF IDEOLOGICAL AND PERSONAL MOTIVES. AS A FORMER MEMBER OF THE TROTSKYITE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY (LSSP), SUBASINGHE WAS ONE OF THE "MIDWIVES" INVOLVED IN THE CREATION OF THE UNITED FRONT OF SLFP, LSSP, AND THE COMMUNIST (DP), IN 1968. THAT COALITION HAS DISINTEGRATED WITH THE EXPULSION OF THE LSSP IN 1975 AND THE RESIGNATION OF THE CP LAST MONTH. AS ONE OF THE MOST LEFTIST MEMBERS OF THE NEW SOLELY SLFP CABINET (AND PRESIDENT OF THE SRI LANKA-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY), HIS RESIGNATION HAD BEEN EARGERLY SOUGHT BY LSSP AND CP LEADERS.

2. HIS IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITY FOR THE MORE LEFTIST

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PAGE 02 COLOMB 00750 020328Z

PARTIES WAS ONE FACTOR IN HIS RESIGNATION; ANOTHER WAS THE POLITICAL POSITION OF HIS SON-IN-LAW, NIHAL PERERA, A FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE BANK OF CEYLON. PERERA WAS RECENTLY NAMED AN OFFICE-BEARER IN THE NEW PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PDP), FORMED BY NANDA ELLAWALA AND THREE OTHER RECENTLY RESIGNED SLFP M.P.'S PERERA APPARENTLY INTENDS TO CONTEST SUBASINGHE'S CONSTITUENCY

ON THE PDP TICKET AND HAD ASKED THE MINISTER TO STEP ASIDE FOR HIM.

3. WHILE THIS RESIGNATION WILL BE WELCOMED BY THE PM'S OPPOSITION, PARTICULARLY THE LSSP, AS A FURTHER SIGN OF DISSATISFACTION WITH HER GOVERNMENT, SUBASINGHE IS NOT EXPECTED TO JOIN ANY OPPOSITION PARTY OR CAMPAIGN ACTIVELY FOR THE OPPOSITION. MANY BELIEVE THAT HE SEES THIS ACTION AS HERALDING HIS RETIREMENT FROM POLITICS.

4. SUBASINGHE'S RESIGNATION FOLLOWS BY 10 DAYS THAT OF PIETER KEUNEMAN WHO LEFT THE GOVERNMENT WITH THE REST OF THE CP FEBRUARY 19. KEUNEMAN'S POST AS MINISTER OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION WAS FILLED BY C. KUMARASURIAR, WHO ALREADY HOLDS THE PORTFOLIO OF POSTS AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS. THE PM'S ACTION IN ASKING KUMARASURIAR TO ASSUME ANOTHER PORTFOLIO WAS REPORTEDLY TAKEN TO AVOID SINGLING OUT ONE AMONG MANY ASPIRANTS FOR PROMOTION TO MINISTERIAL RANK.

5. COMMENT: SUBASINGHE'S RESIGNATION IS A FURTHER INDICATION OF THE EROSION OF PM BANDARANAIKE'S POSITION. THE PM HAD ALREADY DISCOUNTED THE RESIGNATION, SAYING PUBLICLY THAT ONE OR TWO MORE PARTY M.P.'S MIGHT LEAVE; HOWEVER, A SENIOR MINISTER IS MORE THAN JUST ANOTHER M.P. SUBASINGHE, UNLIKE THE FIVE SLFP M.P.'S WHO RESIGNED LAST MONTH, LEFT RELATIVELY QUIETLY, AT LEAST SO FAR WITHOUT INVECTIVE DIRECTED AT THE PARTY OR LEADER.
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PAGE 03 COLOMB 00750 020328Z

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